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Bluetrek Surface Sound Compact Bluetooth speaker

Want a speaker for in-car calling?

by Chris Hall published on 8 August 2008

With legislation outlawing the use of mobile phones whilst behind the wheel, there is more interest than ever in handsfree solutions. Will this visor-mounted offering from Bluetrek steer us in the right direction? We find out.

We looked at the Bluetrek Surface Sound Duo a few months back and found a number of problems with it. The Surface Sound Compact isn't really compact, it just removes the headset mounting option, leaving you with the same mic on a stick and NXT flat panel speaker.

This, we feel, is a smart move, as the headset compatibility caused a serious problem with the Duo in that you were restricted to headsets from Bluetrek, but not all models, as only certain headsets were supported. The compact now just functions as a Bluetooth device in its own right.

The clip is the same clip, but overall the device is lighter than the Duo, so wobbles less, however, due to the width of the speaker, it still wobbles on that rear clip.

The design is rather basic. Compare it with the recently launched Parrot Minikit Slim and you'll see what we mean. The Surface Sound Compact relies on a pull-down mic as in the Duo and has the same inherent problem - if you move the visor, the mic hits the windscreen.

Control is now handled by two main buttons, a call button and the volume button, which are better than the buttons presented on the Duo. The voice dialling support is probably the most useful feature, but to a certain extent the experience is dictated by your mobile phone handset and how that functions. We found that using the Compact we could easily voice-dial in connection with the Nokia E71.



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Sound is still something of an issue and at times the NXT speaker can be a little shrill on high notes. As with any Bluetooth device, you will have to learn to decode the series of beeps that the Compact puts out to inform you of various states. DSP cleans the background noise out, but can cut some of the finer tones out too, so the caller can come across as stuttery.

Whilst driving we found that the volume level was reasonable, but when you stop the car, you might find it too loud. The volume controls are side mounted, so there is a chance that when you press the button the unit will move and it is worth watching out for the redial option (press and hold volume up) because you might find yourself using this feature inadvertently whilst driving (equally the redial last incoming call option).

You also get a headphone socket that sits alongside the charging port. The headphone option is interesting but difficult to sense where you would use it - surely you'd just use the phone if you could, but if driving do you want to be plugging in a headphone which will then be spanned between yourself and the sunvisor?

Charging is handled via USB, and the supplied 12V adaptor provides power in the car, although you won't want to be charging whilst it is on the visor because again you'll have a cable suspended across the car. Desk charging through your computer or USB hub is much preferred, but once charged you do get good life from a battery charge, more than a normal Bluetooth headset: Bluetrek put the official figure at 15hrs talk and 22 days standby.

VERDICT

Overall, we feel that the Compact is a better option than the Duo. It gives you wider freedom with your choice of headset whilst reducing the overall size of the device.

Design remains an issue as overall it is a pretty unsightly object and lacks that wow factor. The

At a glance

What is it?

NXT Bluetooth speaker

Good

Compatible with range of phones, good volume

Bad

Sound not the greatest, fairly ugly looking, wobbles when driving, distracting

Verdict

There are a number of design concerns with the Surface Sound Compact, but wide compatibility might appeal to some

Price £30

Our score

6/10

Your score

?/10

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pull-down mic which functions as the power on/off function isn't the greatest option and when fitted to the visor, doesn't feel the most secure.